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ABSTRACT

Ways in that to identify alternative assessment procedures that mirror actual performance are explored. The paper focuses on how high schools in three Texas school districts adopted alternative assessment methods and the variables which led to the actual implementation of these procedures by the classroom teachers. The information is intended to provide useful data to school officials interested in initial implementation of alternative assessment in their districts or in making this implementation process more efficient. It is revealed that alternative forms of assessment have shown promise as educational reform but that this reform is seldom utilized throughout a school district. The questions center on teacher and administrator variables, such as knowledge, training, and attitudes; and demographic variables, such as teacher subject area, teacher experience, and size of the school district. It was found that the most important variable leading to the implementation of alternative assessment procedures is each teacher's knowledge level. Teachers who were most likely to use such procedures were those who had a clear understanding of the theory behind alternative assessment, with a firm command of the methodology necessary to implement the procedures in the classroom. It is recommended that alternative assessment theory and practice should be encouraged or made mandatory in all teacher education programs and should be included as a part of state teacher certification. The teacher and administrator interviews are appended. (RJM)

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The Role of the School Administrator in the Implementation of Alternative Assessment Procedures

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The Role of the School Administrator in the Implementation of Alternative Assessment Procedures

The assessment of student learning has always been a cornerstone of American education. For as long as subject matter has been taught and students have learned, the stakeholders of education have been concerned about how efficiently this teaching and learning takes place. Over the years, many different types of assessment have been used both to compare individual student achievement to criterion-based subject matter and to the achievement of other students. Along with these different types of assessment have come many different purposes for assessment and uses for assessment. Alternative forms of assessment have come about due to the call for assessment that mirrors actual performance and assessment that more accurately portrays what the student has learned. This presentation will discuss the role of the school administrator in the implementation of alternative assessment procedures in the high school setting.

Purposes and Objectives

The purposes and objectives of this study were to identify the alternative assessment procedures being used in high schools in three Texas school districts and to determine the variables which led to the actual implementation of these procedures by the classroom teachers. This information was intended to be used to provide useful data to school officials interested in initial implementation of alternative assessment in their districts or in making this implementation process faster or more efficient.

The variables were examined which might cause alternative assessment to make the transition from acceptable theory to implemented procedure in the classroom. Alternative forms of assessment have shown promise as educational reform but this reform is many times not utilized throughout an entire school district or even an entire school. For this reason, this study attempted to show whether widespread implementation of these procedures is likely to be driven by variables associated with the teacher, administrator or demographics.

The specific questions asked covered teacher variables, administrator variables, and demographic variables. Teacher variables included teacher knowledge, training and attitudes in alternative assessment. Administrator variables included administrator knowledge, training and attitudes in alternative assessment. Demographic variables included teacher subject area, teacher experience and size of the school district. All of these variables were compared against the actual teacher implementation of alternative assessment procedures in the classroom.

Important Literature and Significance of the Study

Some factors increase the implementation of alternative assessment procedures. Because alternative assessment involves approaching assessment from a different educational perspective, several scholars have stated that one important factor in implementation is teacher training in the theory behind alternative assessment. Teacher in-service in the application of that theory to the specific classroom setting is also extremely important to increased teacher implementation (Kearns, 1993; Smith, 1993; Stepien & Gallagher, 1993).

Several factors seem to inhibit teacher implementation of alternative assessment procedures. Maeroff (1991) stated that increased demands on teacher time and school district funds would probably be the greatest roadblocks to alternative assessment use. Jorgensen (1993) stated that while teacher training and in-service might be readily available, traditional concepts of assessment with administrators might hinder teacher implementation. Finally, Davis and Felknor (1994) explained that a public outcry for assessment that is standardized and easily comparable might be the downfall of alternative assessment use. This literature leads to the conclusion that a case by case examination is necessary to determine the factors that lead to or hinder the implementation of alternative assessment procedures.

Population, Instrument and Procedures

A group of administrators and a group of teachers from the high schools in each of three Texas school districts were interviewed for the study. The three districts represented a small, medium, and large sized district. The administrator group from each district consisted of the superintendent, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction and the high school principal. The teacher group from each district included the high school language arts, mathematics and social science teachers. A total of 47 interviews were conducted. These consisted of 8 interviews with administrators and 39 interviews with teachers.

The interview schedule was developed by the researcher after review of many similar instruments. The interview schedule for the administrators was composed of three sections. These three sections contained questions on administrator training, knowledge

and attitudes of alternative assessment. The teacher interview schedule was composed of the same three sections as the administrator schedule with the addition of sections containing questions on specific, teacher demographic variables and specific, teacher implementation of alternative assessment.

The interviews were conducted by the researcher on the individual campus sites. The respondents were asked to respond to some Likert scale type questions and were also allowed to speak freely on any question in an open-ended format response. All Likert scale responses and open-ended responses were copied onto the form exactly by the researcher. The interview format was chosen over the traditional survey because of additional qualitative data that this format might allow the researcher to obtain. Through this method, the researcher was able to take not only the responses but the emotions, feelings and attitudes that those responses implied. This was especially evident in the open-ended or free response sections of the interview. For the exact wording of all the questions and the order in which they were presented, please see the Teacher Interview Schedule and the Administrator Interview Schedule in Appendix A and Appendix B following the reference page of this presentation. These schedules will also explain the numbers referred to in the Likert scale questions which are dealt with in the data analysis and findings sections of this presentation.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed and reported using measures of central tendency, correlation coefficients, and qualitative analysis. Teacher demographics, teacher training, teacher knowledge, teacher attitudes, administrator training, administrator knowledge and

administrator attitudes served as the independent variables for the study. Teacher implementation of alternative assessment procedures served as the dependent variable for the study. Mean scores, standard deviations and correlation coefficients were used to analyze the relationship between the teacher independent variables and the dependent variable. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to analyze the relationship between the administrator independent variables and the dependent variable.

Findings

The teacher variables were the best indicators of implementation of alternative assessment procedures. In the section dealing with teacher training in alternative assessment, high levels of teacher training showed a .58 correlation with high levels of teacher implementation of alternative assessment. High levels of teacher self-reported knowledge of alternative assessment showed a .67 correlation with high levels of implementation. Positive teacher attitudes toward alternative assessment showed a .63 correlation with high levels of teacher implementation. In all the areas of teacher self-reported training, knowledge and attitudes toward alternative assessment, moderate to high correlations were found with actual teacher implementation of the procedures.

Demographic variables of teachers were not good indicators of alternative assessment implementation. Teaching experience showed a -.005 correlation with implementation. Teacher subject area had mean scores on implementation of 2.06 for social science, 2.56 for language arts, and 2.37 for math. The negative correlation with teaching experience and the similarity in mean scores with subject areas show that demographics were not good indicators of alternative assessment implementation.

Administrator variables did not prove to be good indicators of teacher implementation. In the medium sized district, administrators had a training mean score of 2.33 and a knowledge mean score of 2.33 while the teachers in this district had an implementation mean of 2.83. In the large sized district, administrators had a training mean score of 4.80 and a knowledge mean score of 4.17 and yet the teachers in the large district had an implementation mean score of only 2.42. In the small sized district, administrators had a training mean score of 2.75 and a knowledge mean score of 3.50 and yet the teachers in the small district had an implementation mean score of only 1.44. These scores show that the district with the lowest levels of administrator training and knowledge in alternative assessment had the highest levels of teacher implementation of the procedures. Also, the districts with the highest levels of administrator training and knowledge had the lowest levels of teacher implementation.

Anecdotal responses were given to supplement the Likert scale answers by many of the teachers and administrators. Basically, these responses fell into one of three categories. Category one included responses that showed a sense of resignation toward the current methods of student evaluation. These teachers and administrators felt that all the evaluation decisions were made at a state or national level and they could not have much impact on the situation anyway. Category two responses showed a positive outlook toward alternative assessment and the possibilities for classroom use. Category three responses showed a negative outlook toward alternative assessment and a desire to remain with a more traditional testing regimen.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The most important variable leading to the implementation of alternative assessment procedures is the knowledge level of the individual teacher. This study found that the teachers who were most likely to use the procedures were those who had a clear understanding of the theory behind alternative assessment and a firm command of the methodology necessary to implement the procedures in the classroom. Teacher training was another important variable in this process, however many of the teachers who rated high on knowledge level claimed to have acquired this knowledge through self training with educational journals and magazines. However obtained, teacher knowledge was the most important variable.

The assumption cannot be made that older, more experienced teachers will feel more comfortable with alternative assessment or that one subject area, such as English, would lend itself more to the procedures. This leads to the conclusion that school districts leaning toward alternative assessment should provide training for all the teachers and not assume that the younger ones received the training in pre-service programs or that more experienced teachers will figure it out for themselves. Also, alternative assessment proved to be just as usable in the mathematics area as in English or social science, so training across the entire curriculum would be needed.

The least effective variables studied were those associated with school administrators. These three districts seemed to show a sense of autonomy on the part of teachers and a certain separation from administration in terms of instructional and

evaluation issues. The numbers bear out the fact that in the very districts where well trained and informed school administrators attempted to "drive" alternative assessment use, the levels of implementation were the lowest, as teachers apparently set their minds to do "their own thing". Moreover, in districts where administrators never even mentioned alternative assessment use, many teachers took it upon themselves to learn about and implement the procedures. In the area of alternative assessment implementation, there seems to be a separation that exists between the central office and the classroom and even the school office and the classroom.

This study recommends that alternative assessment theory and practice should be encouraged or made mandatory in all teacher education programs and should be included as a part of state teacher certification. Also, school districts and educational service centers should provide teachers access to continuing education opportunities in the area of alternative assessment theory and practice. District level administrators and school site administrators need not be trained in the actual alternative assessment procedures but should be required to implement a process that compensates teachers for additional training and encourages professional development and self-motivated improvement among the instructional staff. In addition, school site administrators should attempt to work more closely with teachers to aid in instructional improvement and provide opportunities for teachers to take risks and try innovative evaluation strategies

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Appendix A

THE TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Section One-General Information and Training
1)What is your teaching experience in years?
2)What subject or subjects do you teach?
3)What specific training have you had in the area of alternative or authentic forms of assessment of student learning?

Section Two-Knowledge Level
Which one of the following best describes your knowledge level in terms of the use of alternative assessment procedures?
1)No knowledge of alternative assessment procedures.
2)Knowledge of alternative assessment procedures but insufficient knowledge to use them in my own classroom.
3)Sufficient knowledge of alternative assessment to use the procedures in my own classroom.
4)Sufficient knowledge of alternative assessment procedures to use them in my own classroom and to help train other teachers in the use of the procedures.
5)Sufficient knowledge of alternative assessment procedures to use them in my own classroom, train others and teach courses on the procedures or write about the use of the procedures in articles.
Additional comments:

Section Three-Attitudes
Which of the following best describes your attitudes toward the use of alternative assessment procedures to measure student progress or learning?
1)I do not feel that alternative assessment procedures should be used at all in the classroom.
2)I feel that alternative assessment procedures can be used in combination with traditional assessment but only the traditional forms should be used for grading, retention or graduation.
3)I feel that alternative assessment procedures can be used in combination with traditional assessment and both should be used equally in grading , retention or graduation.
4)I feel that alternative assessment procedures can be used in combination with traditional assessment but only the alternative forms should be used for grading, retention or graduation.
5)I feel that alternative assessment procedures should be the only method of assessment used in the classroom.
Additional comments:

Section Four-Alternative Assessment Implementation or Use

Of all the assessment that you do of student mastery or student learning which of the following best describes the total percentage of this assessment that is done through alternative forms.

1)I do not use alternative assessment procedures at all in my classroom.

2)I use alternative assessment procedures for about 25 percent of the total assessment I perform.

3)I use alternative assessment procedures for about half of the total assessment I perform.

4)I use alternative assessment procedures for about 75 percent of the total assessment I perform.

5)I use alternative assessment procedures exclusively in my classroom.

Please list and comment on the types of alternative assessment you have used, are using or intend to use in your classroom.

Appendix B

THE ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Section One-General Information and Training
1)What is your job title with the school district?
2)What specific training have you had in the area of alternative or authentic forms of assessment of student learning?

Section Two-Knowledge Level
Which one of the following best describes your knowledge level in terms of the use of alternative assessment procedures?
1)No knowledge of alternative assessment procedures.
2)Knowledge of alternative assessment procedures but insufficient knowledge to use them in my own classroom.
3)Sufficient knowledge of alternative assessment to use the procedures in my own classroom.
4)Sufficient knowledge of alternative assessment procedures to use them in my own classroom and to help train others in the use of the procedures.
5)Sufficient knowledge of alternative assessment procedures to use them in my own classroom, train others and teach courses on the procedures or write about the use of the procedures in articles.
Additional comments:

Section Three-Attitudes
Which of the following best describes your attitudes toward the use of alternative assessment procedures to measure student progress or learning?
1)I do not feel that alternative assessment procedures should be used at all in the classroom.
2)I feel that alternative assessment procedures can be used in combination with traditional assessment but only the traditional forms should be used for grading, retention or graduation.
3)I feel that alternative assessment procedures can be used in combination with traditional assessment and both should be used equally in grading, retention or graduation.
4)I feel that alternative assessment procedures can be used in combination with traditional assessment but only the alternative forms should be used for grading, retention or graduation.
5)I feel that alternative assessment procedures should be the only method of assessment used in the classroom.
Additional comments: